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ABSTRACT

While teacher educators prepare students throughout their coursework for successful teaching careers, the subjects of interviewing and the rigorous demands of full-time teaching are often not specifically covered. This paper reviews the essentials of interviewing techniques and addresses issues related to the realities of a first full-time teaching position. Steps in the hiring process are outlined, including those prior to the interview and aspects beyond the control of the candidate; 26 possible questions candidates may encounter are listed. Suggestions are offered for helping students prepare to meet the challenges that will probably confront them as beginning teachers. These are: maintaining classroom discipline; managing classroom instruction and facilitating students' learning and mastery of material; and adapting to the workload. The paper closes with suggestions to help students prepare for a fourth challenge: that teachers be familiar with the formal and informal requirements for successful teaching in their specific school and district. (Contains 12 references.) (ND)

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From Field Experience to Full-time Teaching: Letting Teachers Know How to Face Interviews and What to Expect on the Job

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From Field Experience to Full-time Teaching: Letting Teachers Know How to Face Interviews and What to Expect on the Job

Ask almost any group of teacher candidates who have completed student teaching what their plans are, and they respond almost immediately: Secure an interview and accept a job offer! Teacher educators prepare students throughout their coursework for successful teaching careers, and yet their job does not really end with the student teaching experience. An interview is a challenge for prospective teachers, to say nothing about the "on the job" realities that confront them in their first full-time teaching assignments.

This article reviews the essentials of interviewing techniques and also focuses on the demanding realities of a first full-time teaching assignment. By addressing the subjects of interviewing and the rigorous demands of full-time teaching, teacher educators can help bridge the gap between field experience and full-time teaching.

Interviewing

Two questions guide school administrators as they interview teacher candidates. These are: "Does this candidate seem to be a 'good match' in this district and in our school?" and "Does this candidate fit into our district?" Research supports these administrators' questions and concerns.

Lipham and Hoch (1974) define the selection of staff as the "elimination of candidates whose values, interests, needs, and abilities, having been carefully analyzed, fail to satisfy the requirements for a particular role" (p. 236). Very often, principals - and others who will be involved in the selection process - have a concept of the type of person they desire for the vacancy. They may want someone much like themselves, or a person similar to the teacher being replaced.

As a result, very qualified candidates may not be chosen simply because they do not fit this concept of the person who should be hired. Candidates for teaching positions should be made aware of this selection process by their professors and told that they may not be selected because someone else fit more exactly the profile desired, not that they were always better qualified.

In order to reach the interview stage, however, teacher candidates who might be "good matches" with school districts create an impression with specific documents. Typically, applicants will be asked to submit a letter of application, complete an application form, submit a resume, college credentials and references, transcripts, and evidence of the proper state certificate for the position they are seeking. Today, more and more states are requiring a computer background check by a police department or state police agency. Some districts may require a test and/or a writing sample from all candidates.

Once applications are received by a school district, they are screened before interviews are held. How this is done and by whom will vary from district to district. This screening process may be done by the principal, a department chair, a teacher in charge of a grade level, the superintendent, the personnel office, or any combination.

Once the screening is completed, the actual interview process will also be different in various school districts. All of the different people mentioned above are possibilities for the interview process. And, while some districts will have only the principal interview candidates (especially during the summer when teachers are not as available), other districts will have the candidate go through a series of interviews with different groups.

Although interviews are an integral part of the hiring process, there is not agreement on the usefulness of the process. Lunenburg and Ornstein (1991) state that "despite its widespread use, the interview is a poor predictor of job performance" (p. 473). Kimbrough (1990) agrees that "interviews have been repeatedly found to be an invalid means for selection" (p. 267). Dessler (1988) points out that the interviewer often tends to make a personnel decision during the first few minutes of the interview, then spends the rest of the interview asking questions to obtain information to confirm the decision. Others have said that interviewers often tend to hire people like themselves, even though people like Martin (1970) have said that schools should have some degree of "philosophic disequilibrium" and that principals should not select people on the basis of their closeness to their own views.

Regardless of opinions about interviews, they will continue to be used. So, future teachers should be aware of some of the types of questions which may be asked, and they must be prepared to answer them. First of all, there are some questions which are inappropriate or even illegal:

- Are you married?
- Do you have children? Do you plan to have children?

- Have you ever been arrested?
- What is your husband's (wife's) job?
- *Do you have any sons over six feet tall who play basketball?* (One of the authors heard this question being asked in an interview by a board member who could not understand why it was wrong to ask it.)

Here are some questions that may be asked.

1. Tell us about your educational background and experience.
2. What do you consider to be your strengths? your weaknesses?
3. Think about your various teaching (or student teaching) experiences and recall one experience that went very well, maybe better than you expected. Tell me about it.
4. Tell me about an experience that did not go well. What happened?
5. What are your future plans? Where do you want to be in five years?
6. What hobbies and interests do you have outside teaching that give you a chance to relax and do a good job when you return to the classroom?
7. Why do you want this position?
8. What do you know about this district? this school?
9. Why do you want to teach?
10. While each day is different, imagine that I walked into a typical classroom where you were teaching. What would I see going on? Describe it to me.
11. Everyone has some disciplinary problems in the classroom. Tell how you handle them.
12. What grades would you prefer teaching? Why? (for elementary

teaching applicants; if interviewing for a secondary position, there should be some questions relating to the subject area to test for knowledge, probably asked by the department chair).

13. What do you enjoy about teaching?

14. What questions do you have for us about this position and this school/district?

15. Think about the best teacher you had. Tell us how that person taught, how he/she ran the class, what you liked and admired about this teacher.

16. What can you bring to our school?

17. We are interviewing five people today. Why should we choose you?

18. Do you have any experience in teaching minorities (or special education or lower level students or older students, etc., depending on the position and the school)?

19. In our school, we are trying (some innovation or new organization). What is your experience with this? Can you adapt to it?

20. What things have you done successfully to motivate children in the classroom? to establish rapport with them? to get their attention?

21. How do you work with students with different ability levels in the same classroom? What specific things have you done?

22. What different teaching techniques have you used? Which have been the most successful? Why do you think they worked?

23. What can I do (as principal, department chair, etc.) to help you?

24. If I asked the teacher next door to you to tell me about your teaching (or student teaching), what would he/she say? What would your evaluator say?

25. What kind of professional books, magazines, or journals do you read?

26. Why do you want to leave your present job (if employed) for this one?

What New Teachers Need to Know

Having succeeded the interview process, most new teachers assume they are ready to fulfill the responsibilities of full-time classroom instruction. However, the first month, if not the first year of teaching, can be very difficult. Three major challenges confront new teachers.

These three challenges can become overwhelming demands; they are administrators' expectations related to specific teacher behaviors. Teachers must be able to:

- Maintain classroom discipline
- Manage classroom instruction, facilitating students' learning and mastery, and
- Adapt to the workload - preparation; teaching; grading; fulfilling extra-duty assignments; participating in committee responsibilities, etc.

There is a fourth demand that challenges new teachers, and this last demand, though not as crucial as the three listed above, impacts teachers' acclimation to the profession and the school district. The fourth demand? To become familiar with what is required of teachers in this district, in this particular setting, for no two schools or districts are alike.

A brief review of the three expectations follows, and, subsequently,

relevant suggestions for teacher educators; in addition, there is a list of particulars related to the fourth demand, teachers' acclimation.

Three demands on new teachers

The first demand: Maintain classroom discipline

Teachers must specify a "code of conduct," the classroom rules that outline behavioral expectations for students. These let students know their limits and that consequences follow infringement of rules. New teachers also need to know how to handle specific but routine problems, including students' lack of attention; note-passing or conversing with others; failure to become involved in lessons; not completing homework or arriving without necessary books and materials, and not cooperating. New teachers must reveal flexibility and understand motivations as they hold students accountable for their behavior.

What complicates good discipline strategies is the desire to get to know students and to engage them in educational pursuits; teachers want students to enjoy learning and the subject matter. Leniency often follows, plus the fear of resorting to outside intervention by speaking to the assistant principal, dean, or counselor. Will these specialists suspect them of having too little discipline in the classroom? In addition, new teachers spend a great deal of time planning lessons, so much so that the

subject material takes precedence over discussing behavioral expectations, if not role-playing and practicing appropriate behavior.

The second demand: Manage classroom instruction, facilitating students' learning and mastery

It is extraordinarily difficult to exhibit the teaching behaviors of seasoned professionals in the first year of teaching. Creating purposeful lessons geared to specific objectives and goals looms as a daily pressure, let alone individualizing instruction.

Effective classroom management requires that teachers set specific goals per class, pace a lesson, use blocks of time wisely, review students' previous learning and, then, summarize and conclude before assigning practice exercises or new work. Effective management means students are involved, engaged on task, and responsible for an outcome - completion of a worksheet or experiment; applying concepts to a new problem; working with a group to answer a question, etc. - whether the means are discussions, panels, activity centers or stations, or working independently. Management is facilitated when all students have assignment or activity sheets or schedules of lessons; students then know the content of classroom lessons.

New teachers struggle to introduce and review material as well as

coordinate all the activities required to teach a unit. Often, setting a goal for students each day becomes a lower priority which yields to efforts to create activity sheets, a game, a program, or some other way of involving students in learning by making the material interesting. In addition, planning an entire unit's activities starts from a judgment, estimating how long students must work on a specific lesson in order to achieve mastery. When students require additional practice or when teachers need to re-teach, the printed activity schedule may no longer be current. Students react with confusion if they cannot follow a printed schedule or activity sheet.

The third demand: Adapt to the workload - preparation; teaching; grading; fulfilling extra-duty assignments; participation in committee responsibilities, etc.

New teachers often experience excessive fatigue; unlike other jobs, teaching requires a great deal of preparation each and every day, all year long. Good teaching rarely involves sitting at a desk; rather, teachers actively manage each class, lead the group, help small groups or panels, and check individual student progress. Planning units is as time-consuming as grading papers; if students complete homework and in-class exercises, these must be read and graded. Extra-duty assignments and

committee responsibilities may add to new teachers' perception of being overwhelmed; few new teachers anticipate the burden of full-time teaching loads.

New teachers often resort to late-night hours preparing for the next day's classes, only to "collapse" at week's end. At that point, they attempt to catch up, read ahead, plan accordingly, create the next week's lessons and the necessary activities - and also grade papers. Add to their burden the necessity for contacting parents to confer about individual students' progress, the need to fill out various forms, reports and surveys, the requirement to submit more "formal" lesson plans to department chairs, or the obligation to attend professional meetings, workshops, or conferences. These realities surprise and fatigue, if not overwhelm, new teachers.

Teacher educators can help students preparing for teaching careers

How can teacher educators prepare tomorrow's teachers for these three demands, the extent of which escapes many student teachers? A brief list of suggestions follows.

1. Require all students to understand, discuss, and practice techniques of maintaining effective classroom discipline. Assign research

studies so that students review a variety of approaches to this essential requirement. Allow "seasoned" teachers to lecture about techniques that work for them; encourage their sharing illustrative anecdotes. Have students observe the teaching behaviors of experienced teachers in classrooms. Schedule sessions that require them to role-play appropriate reactions to rule infringements, including students not bringing required materials or homework or their failure to become involved in a day's lesson. Every practice, every observation, and every discussion of discipline problems allows teachers to understand how important and necessary evolving their own systems of classroom discipline is.

2. Before their first full-time teaching assignments, students must understand the importance of setting specific but realistic goals per classroom period and per unit of instruction. Allow them to practice teaching sample lessons using a wide variety of activities to engage students at various age levels, and to routinely have alternatives ready if the planned activities do not work. Creating assignment sheets or monthly schedules which still allow teachers flexibility comes from knowing the abilities of various age groups, intense discussion among peers, and practice. Interviewing experienced teachers and observing their classroom management styles are worthwhile activities.

Understanding how to involve and motivate students requires future teachers' analysis of various behaviors; i.e. a student eager to learn who is interested in the subject will not react to new material in the same manner as a student who has experienced little previous success with the subject matter or one who simply is disengaged in all learning. Each type of student often is represented in the same classroom. Similarly, students preparing for their first full-time teaching assignments need to draw from a wide variety of choices to reach objectives, whether whole-class discussions; small groups; panels; activity centers, and other techniques. Students' individual learning styles differ markedly; their approaches to the material must be reflected in classroom activities.

3. Allow students to discuss "short-cuts" that still allow material to be taught, with somewhat less assigned paperwork. Future teachers may need a fund of workbook-style exercises, besides questions and problems from older textbooks, to draw from. These will also require adapting to the needs and abilities of their students. Suggest that future teachers create dialogues with mentors on the job, teachers who have taught the subject and who may possess ideas and exercises that relate to course objectives. All teachers should have access to files of tests, activities, worksheets, and study guides; some schools keep these in a

department office manned by a secretary who monitors file contents and supplies extra copies of much-borrowed exercises. Future teachers might learn from the experience of fellow professionals who describe personal strategies to adapt to the demands of teaching and still create balance in their lives, avoiding burnout.

The fourth demand: Familiarity with what is required of teachers in this district, in this setting

Because no two schools or districts are exactly alike, new teachers benefit from understanding the formal and informal requirements for teachers in a given district. Teachers may benefit from familiarity with:

- Key support staff members and their roles

Some students' problems interfere with their learning and require intervention. Teachers will need to know the parameters and limits of help available in the district. A school psychologist, social worker, and counseling staff members may welcome the chance to describe their roles in school and their successes.

- School traditions and philosophy, including the slogan, motto, insignia or seal, and notable awards and recognitions received

A school's tradition transcends a reference to "We are the mighty Hawks"; in fact, the tradition and philosophy guide school

decisions and, sometimes, guide employees. A description of each school's historical highlights, its changes over the years, its degree of conservatism or liberalism, and its climate and atmosphere reveals uniquenesses. Providing newcomers with a written history or a statement of philosophy may not do justice to that school's approach to education.

- Facts about the school's neighborhood and neighbors

How does the community view the school and its teachers? Similarly, how do its immediate neighbors, those closest to the building, regard education, educators and students? Has the community changed? What are the demographics? Are there teen centers or certain stores where students congregate? Is it acceptable for teachers to run on an outdoor track after school, for example, or is that viewed as dereliction of duty?

- Availability of an apolitical mentor to confide in and ask questions of (may or may not teach in one's department)

An insider may have valuable information about power relationships in the school, the influence of union leaders, and the important school leaders, including their style of operating.

- Role of school office staff

Secretaries, for example, are in key positions in a building;

some feel that they, themselves run the school. Others are nearly terrors; still others can be very helpful.

- Department philosophy and chairperson's priorities

In one district, a department chair expects new teachers to participate in local, regional, and state professional organizations; many of the meetings occur on weekends. Teachers are also expected in that department to author new courses of study and present papers at subject-area conferences and meetings. These expectations did not surface in interviews prior to hiring.

- Key issues of importance for this school, this district

Where does attention focus in this district? Curriculum improvement? A recent strike, its aftermath, and the move toward "healing"? Sports? Commitment to "tight control"? The open campus issue or other student rights and freedoms? Board members? New curriculum director or other administrative personnel? Good public relations in the community? Commitment to zero tolerance of controlled substances? Each school has its own issues.

- Expectations of faculty and staff

What has been left *unwritten* in the teachers' handbook? What is the accepted style of dress, degree of informality? How would

administrators describe the level of professionalism expected of staff?

- Principal's philosophy and "agenda"; the superintendent's philosophy and "agenda"

Since building administrators maintain a vision for the school and its educational efforts, teachers and staff will be influenced, if not evaluated, in terms of adherence to that vision, philosophy, and agenda. Similarly, the superintendent's priorities affect every member of the school community

- Classroom necessities for day-to-day efficiency

Availability of xerox for "emergency" use, as well as needed supplies; whom to contact about repairs or pencil sharpeners or special furniture (one student may not fit into the regular-size desks and desires a table and chair); procedures for obtaining audio-visual aids - all are crucial for effective instructional efforts.

- Policies on using guest speakers, field trips, "sensitive" unit material and film

Educators must be unusually sensitive to parent/guardian objections to featured speakers, field trips, the language and content in texts and learning materials, and the subject matter reviewed in classes. Everything from creationism to gay-lesbian issues may offend some

parent/guardians. Alternative learning activities must be available for students whose parents do not want them to participate in certain class units.

- School philosophy of discipline

What is acceptable behavior, and what is not? Besides the specific rules stated in the student handbook, what is the general philosophy of discipline? Note: students may routinely go to the visitors' parking area to smoke during lunch hours in one building - and everyone seems to "look the other way."

- Familiarity with security officers, their locations throughout the building, and the policy on school visitors (unfamiliar students or adults in the building)

What security measures are in place? Do all visitors wear a special badge? Are certain doors always locked? Does the hall monitor on the first floor greet all visitors and lead them to the office?

- Non-routine or emergency procedures

A teacher notices a student carrying what appears to be a knife, or several students seem to exchange money and a small, unidentifiable packet. Or, a teacher witnesses several students exchanging angry words, and a small scuffle ensues. What steps should be taken in a

non-routine situation?

- Parameters of parent/guardian contact

Parent/guardians need to be contacted if students create problems in class, if they are not completing work, or if they seem troubled or upset. What are the building guidelines provided? Is there a form to fill out to alert administrators to perceived problems? Is a counselor to be sought out first? Should new teachers keep notes about all conversations in a special file, with dates and times? How does the administration want things handled, under ideal conditions?

- Availability of principal, assistant principal and deans

Is it advisable to drop by an administrator's office to share concerns, or must questions and observations appear in writing? How formal or informal is the organizational structure in the building?

- How to succeed at teaching and merit another year's contract

What guarantees a "good fit" between new hires and the schools they are teaching in? What shows that new teachers are committed, doing the job well, and succeeding with students? Should new teachers hide or disguise problems, for example? How involved in extracurricular activities does one need to be? Should new teachers volunteer for various committees and participate in as many school social

activities as possible?

- Gauging the importance of the faculty lounge

Periodic attendance in the lounge may yield dividends, or a school's lounge may be considered off-limits except for the nearly-retired faculty members. Note: one enterprising principal in a suburban district had a special switch so that announcements would be heard in every room of the building; the switch also enabled him to listen in on faculty lounge conversations - and repeat what he had heard to individuals holding those conversations.

- Teaching the curriculum, teaching the course goals, using the prescribed texts, or adhering to the prescribed "outcome-based" educational materials

How much leeway is there for teachers?

- Sending copies of unit plans, assignment sheets, activity calendars, worksheets, interesting applications of course goals, and project choices for students to administrators

The department chair and the principal might <u>want</u> to know what strategies new teachers use to engage students in learning.

- Availability of publicity

New teachers might ask for copies of district newsletters, annual

reports, report cards, and any publicity related to the school.

A final review

Teacher educators can bridge the gap between student teaching and full-time teaching assignments. The two experiences are similar, but not identical. Prospective teachers anticipate interviews with some degree of uncertainty and nervousness. Then, new teacher hires are often overwhelmed with the workload, the wide-ranging responsibilities, and expectations.

Facilitating new teachers' entry into the profession starts with students' earliest coursework and ends with practice teaching experience. Although assessments and attention to individual problems are possible when reviewing student teachers' daily logs, notebooks, journals, and reaction papers, it is almost too late in their experience since the focus, more often than not during practice teaching, centers on effective teaching practices in individual classes. Rather, adequate attention to vital issues, those listed above, is necessary.

The three key problems for new teachers include discipline, classroom management, and adaptation to the workload. In addition, teachers need to be aware of the formal and informal requirements for successful teaching in the district. Each school is unique, and teachers

need to "ask the right questions" and seek information about a number of issues related to familiarity with what is expected in a specific school setting. Ultimately, their professional growth and success depend upon the fourth demand, as well as their understanding discipline techniques, classroom management strategies, and adaptation to the workload.

Students' success in their first full-time classroom jobs depends upon teacher educators who address the specifics of interviewing as well as all four demands in courses throughout academic study and preparation. The four demands are also what new teachers need to know.

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